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The ACADIAN FISHERY *in Nova Scotia*

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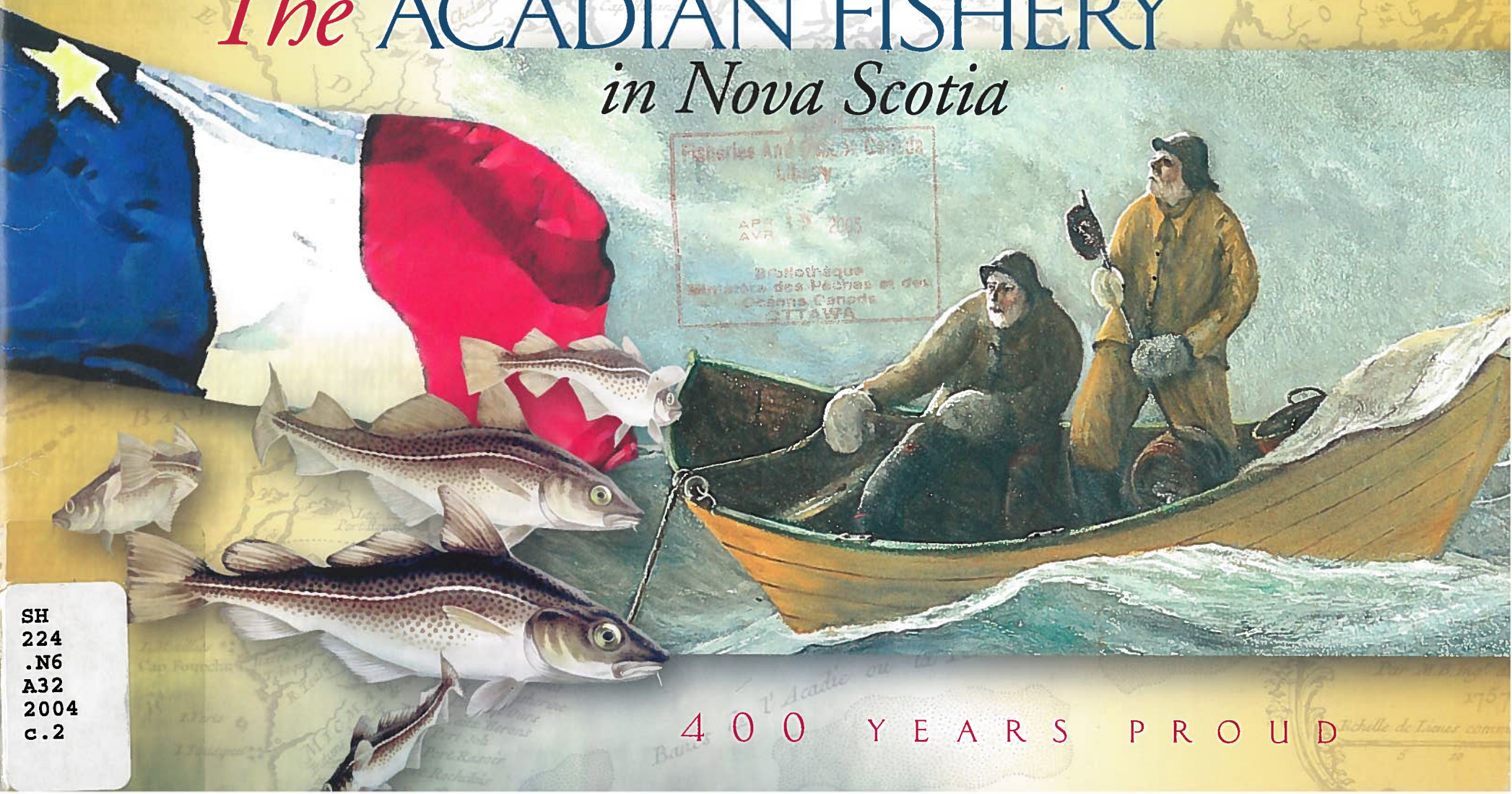

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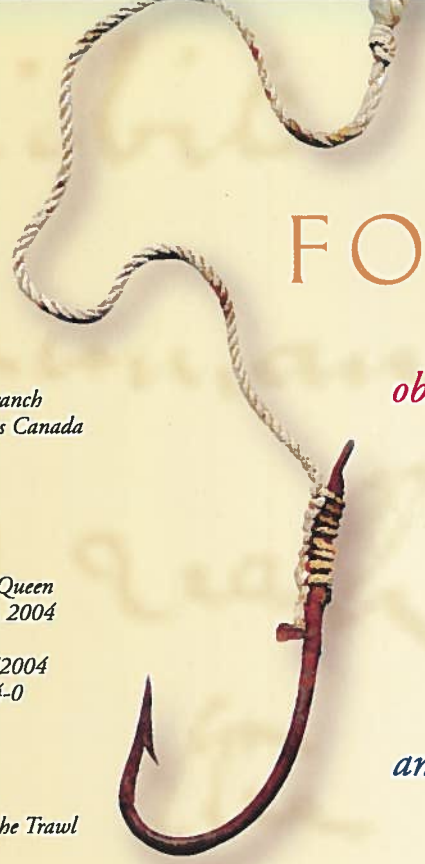
400 YEARS PROUD



Hook: Acadian Museum and Archives, West Pubnico

FOREWORD

*The origin of the name **Acadia** or **Acadie** is obscure. Whether the name was derived from a place name in Europe, from a Mi'kmaq or Maliseet word, or possibly a combination thereof, it has found a wide and varied acceptance on two continents. No matter what the origin of the name, Acadians and their culture have influenced the development of the commercial fishery in Nova Scotia for 400 years.*

This publication commemorates the 400th anniversary of the Acadian presence in Nova Scotia and the third Congrès mondial acadien, which is being held to celebrate this landmark anniversary. The publication is dedicated to Acadians who, from the early days of the 17th century, turned to the abundance of the sea for their survival and who have continued to be a major influence in the Nova Scotia fishery – the biggest and most valuable fishery in Canada – to the present day.

Geoff Regan

THE HONOURABLE GEOFF REGAN
MINISTER OF FISHERIES AND OCEANS

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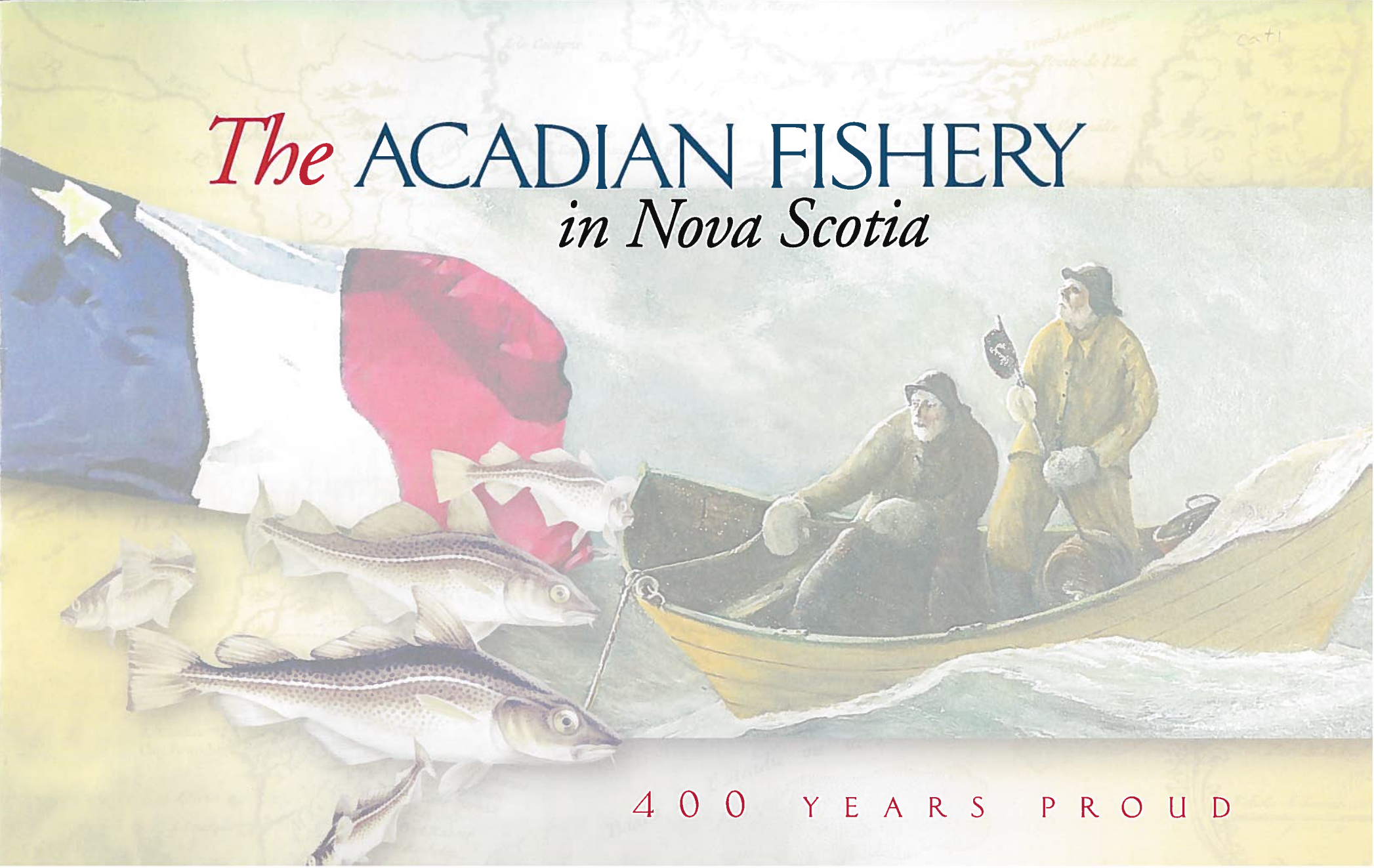
The ACADIAN FISHERY
in Nova Scotia



400 YEARS PROUD

Historic ACADIE

National Library of Canada

1604

First colonization attempt by the French on Isle Sainte-Croix.

1605

Port Royal, which will become the major town of Acadie, is settled.

1632

Isaac de Razilly arrives with 300 settlers, ancestors of most Acadian families.

1671

The earliest surviving Acadian census is taken. The total count comes to 340 people.

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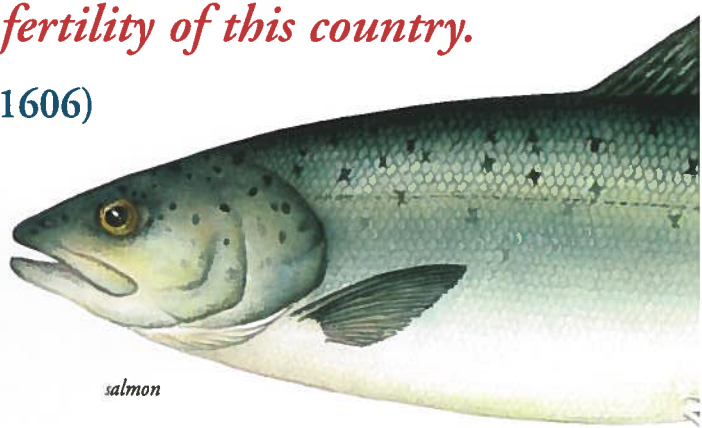
The New WORLD

sturgeon

The sturgeons and salmons ascend the Dauphin River at the said Port Royal in such quantities that they carried away the nets which we had set for them. Fish abound there in like manner everywhere; such is the fertility of this country.

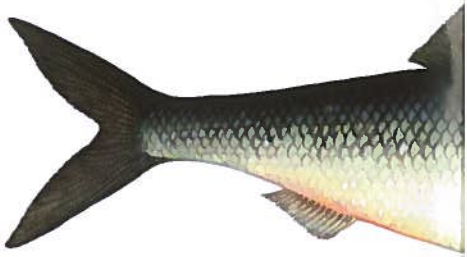
Marc Lescarbot, *Nova Francia* (1606)

Lescarbot, a pioneer at Port Royal with Champlain, wrote that the New World had fish in abundance for those willing to work. Ever since those early days, the fishery has formed part of Acadian life. Four centuries after their first landing, Acadians today hold a major place in the Nova Scotia fishery; Canada's biggest and most valuable.



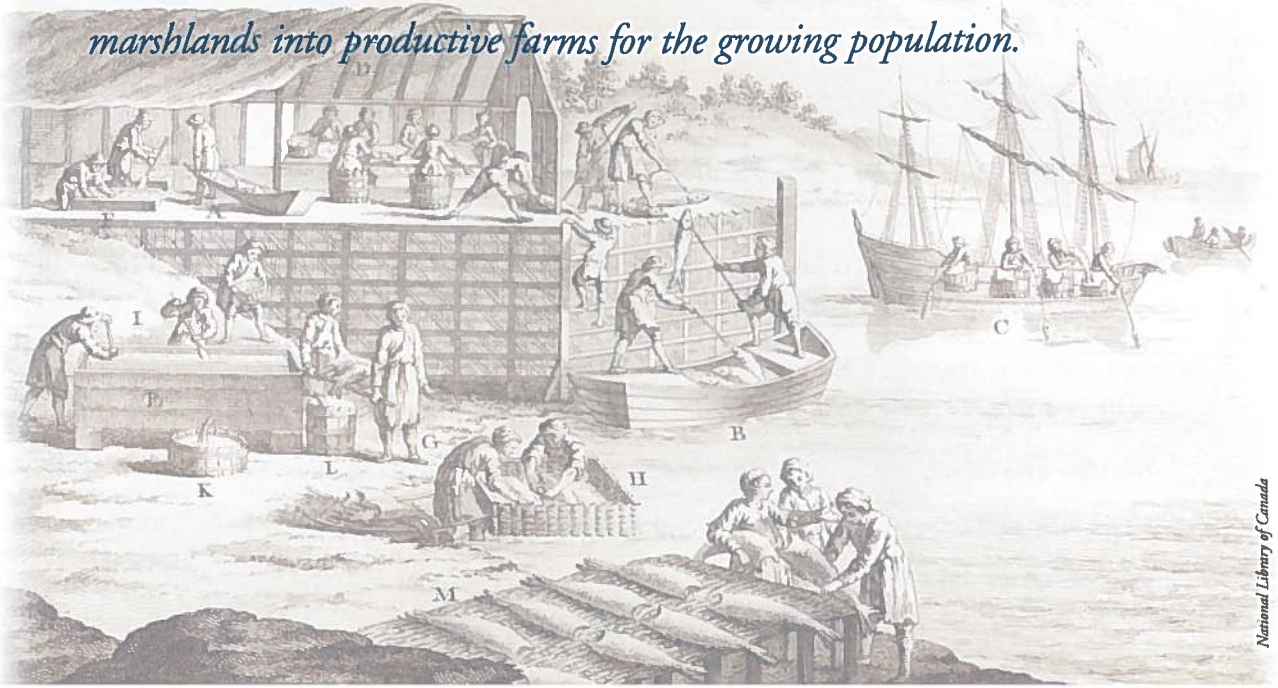
salmon

The early ACADIAN FISHERY



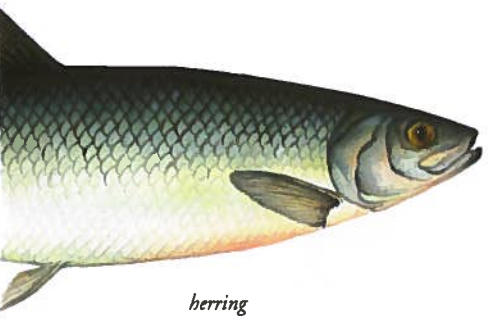
After the first French settlers braved ocean and wilderness, the Acadian population grew mainly in the Port Royal, Grand Pré, and Isthmus of Chignecto areas of what became Nova Scotia. The newcomers from Europe established good relations with the Native population, beginning a long tradition of peace and co-operation. Acadians tamed the tides with dikes, turning marshlands into productive farms for the growing population.

Compass: Acadian Museum and Archives, West Pubnico



Depiction of early French fishing process

National Library of Canada



herring

They also used the ocean's own wealth. In the main and outlying settlements, salmon, clams, cod, shad, smelt, herring, mackerel, eels, and other species provided food for the table. Fish also figured in commerce.

Many families kept boats, learning to cope with the Bay of Fundy's fogs and strong currents, and with the world's highest tides. Besides hooks and lines, early fishers used ingenious spears and other devices. They fashioned weirs of brush to trap fish moving on the tide. Meanwhile, France, England, and New Englanders intermittently argued and fought for possession of Acadie. Outside the Bay of Fundy, French settlements in Nova Scotia and the Gulf of St. Lawrence remained relatively small and isolated at first. But after 1713, when Britain took over mainland Nova Scotia, French settlements grew at Prince Edward Island (Isle Saint-Jean) and Cape Breton Island (Isle Royale). Sheltered by the fortress at Louisbourg, Cape Breton became a strong fishing and trading centre. Fishers would split and salt cod and spread them on cobblestone beaches or on *vigneaux* (wooden platforms known in English as flakes) to dry, before shipping them overseas.

Acadians came to form a hard-working, self-helping people, with their own songs, customs, and culture. Then conflicts between Britain and France in North America uprooted them. The Acadians, who had seen previous wars and changes of authority, wanted to stay neutral.

The British, suspicious of their loyalties, decided to send them into exile. In 1755 and following years, the Deportation and the fall of New France scattered some ten thousand Acadians south into the American colonies, northward into New Brunswick and Quebec, and even across the sea to France and later to Louisiana.

After peace came in 1763, many Acadians made their way back to their original Bay of Fundy homeland, only to find that New Englanders had taken over their best farmlands. To make a new start, Acadians more than ever turned to the sea.

1682

Grand Pré, another major Acadian community, is founded.

1713

Acadie is 'permanently' given to the British under the Treaty of Utrecht.

1755

Acadians are scattered throughout the civilized world after refusing to comply with British government decrees. Over 6,000 are deported in the first year.

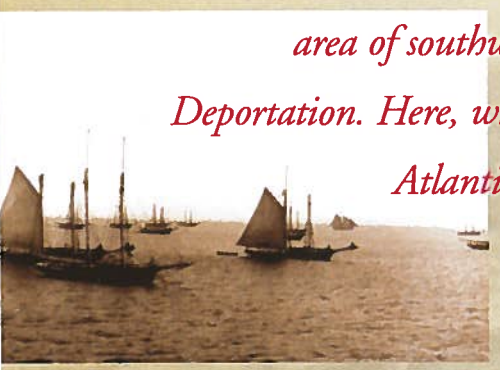
Roger Lloyd, Nova Scotia Department of Education

Re-enactment of Acadian women removing fish from a weir

Typical fishing weir

Fishing in the AGE OF SAIL

Taking what lands they could get, the returning Acadians found themselves scattered in groups along the Maritime Provinces' coastline. A prime fishing area was the Pubnico-Argyle-Wedgeport area of southwest Nova Scotia, where small numbers had lived and fished before the Deportation. Here, where the Bay of Fundy and Gulf of Maine merge with the open Atlantic, a series of islands and long inlets create beautiful coves and harbours.



Fishing schooners in port

Argyle Township Court House and Archives

Edwin LePierre

Lobster fishing, Three Fathom Harbour, 1941

Ice-free waters hold a rich diversity of finfish and shellfish. The area lies relatively close to productive offshore grounds such as Browns Bank and Georges Bank, and to the important New England marketplace.

Acadians in this region built up a vigorous commercial fishery, for cod, pollock, haddock, herring, and other species. By the late 1800s, many schooners fished the banks, or carried fish and other goods to distant destinations including the West Indies. Local boatyards built vessels for shipping and trading. A single Acadian company at Wedgeport operated 11 ships, and leased or held shares in several others. Far more numerous here and elsewhere, however, were small open boats, especially as the lobster fishery grew strong after about 1850.

Further north, along the shore of St. Mary's Bay at the mouth of the Bay of Fundy, Acadians built a string of neighbouring settlements often called the longest village in the world. In such places as Pointe-de-l'Église, Meteghan, and Saulnierville, houses lined the water where meadows sloped down to the sea. This shore had fewer harbours than the Pubnico-Argyle region. Settlers at first followed mainly the lumber trade. But gradually they moved into the fishery, and also took to wooden shipbuilding.

Other coastal Acadians took root east of Halifax particularly in the Chezzetcook area, and at Isle Madame off Cape Breton. On Nova Scotia's Gulf of St. Lawrence shore, Acadians founded communities including Pomquet and Havre-Boucher on the mainland, and Chéticamp on the northwest coast of Cape Breton Island. Others in the Gulf settled on Prince Edward Island or along the shores of New Brunswick, which became the main centre of the Acadian population.

Fishers in the Gulf of St. Lawrence faced special difficulties. From late December until April, ice blocked most fisheries. The Gulf was far from New England and West Indies markets. For much of the 1800s, British fishing companies based in the Channel Islands held many Acadian fishers in an iron grip of indebtedness, including some outside the Gulf at Isle Madame. Pay was low, poverty frequent, and schools almost non-existent.

But Acadian fishers hung on and bettered their lot. In the late 1800s, the lobster fishery provided strong new markets. The Channel Island companies gradually lost their power. Fishers became more independent, and new Acadian-controlled enterprises sprang up in fishing and trading.

Through Wars and Depression TO THE MODERN FISHERY

By the time of the First World War, most Acadian fishers in the Maritimes owned their own motorboats. Larger enterprises operated many schooners. Then the Depression battered the Maritimes, leaving many fishers in desperate shape.

Acadian communities over the centuries had learned resilience and self-reliance. When fishers' co-operatives began to spread, Acadians in both the Gulf and Nova Scotia became their strongest supporters. Some co-ops enabled fishers to get larger vessels, especially after the Second World War.

Post-war, Acadians took the lead in developing major new fisheries for shrimp and crab. They were quick to adopt modern techniques, for example in seining for herring or trawling for cod.

Fishers on a schooner, Pubnico-Argyle area, c. 1905

Argyle Township Court House and Archives

1758

The Acadians who fled to Isle Saint Jean and Isle Royale are rounded up and sent to France.

1763

The war between the French and the British is over. Acadians who have survived the internment in England are sent to France. Some Acadians try to return to Acadie and find their land settled by others.

Their thousands of boats, mostly medium-size or small, fished an array of species including lobster, scallops, herring, mackerel, tuna, and various kinds of groundfish (white-fleshed species such as cod, haddock, and pollock, that live near the ocean bottom). Processors and exporters built up an international trade.

Acadians grew in organization and influence. Among the prominent figures was Hédard Robichaud, Canada's Minister of Fisheries from 1963 to 1968, who speeded development of the modern fishery. Another Acadian, Roméo LeBlanc, served as federal fisheries minister for most of the 1974-82 period. Under LeBlanc, Canada took over a 200-mile fishing zone and set up a comprehensive management system using science, quotas, and licences to control catches. LeBlanc championed independent fishers, giving them new power in the fishery management system. Meanwhile, Acadian fishers built strong organizations and otherwise made their voices heard.

Danish seining near Chéticamp

Acadian Seaplants Limited

Marine plants aquaculture site, Charlesville

Today, Canada's fisheries generate more money than ever before. In 2002, landed value from fishing and aquaculture came to $2.8 billion, and exports to $4.7 billion. The three Maritime Provinces, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island, produced about half that national value. And Acadians contributed to every major Maritime fishery.

snow crab

Acadians in the MODERN FISHERY

In dozens of Acadian communities hugging the sea, visitors find lighthouses, bell buoys, and fishing fleets to delight the eye. But the fishery offers more than local colour. In Nova Scotia, this major industry in 2002 produced landings worth nearly three-quarters of a billion dollars, products worth more than $1 billion, and exports worth $1.2 billion.

Seafood was the province's most valuable export, much of it coming from the four major Acadian fishing areas.

THE PUBNICO-ARGYLE-WEDGEPORT AREA

This mainly Acadian region possesses a dynamic fishery, one of the strongest in Atlantic Canada. The long, narrow Pubnico harbour alone has about a dozen fish plants, generally family-owned. About 1,200 fishers operate some 450 boats, mostly between 35 and 45 feet, with fewer than a hundred below that size. A handful of larger vessels run to more than 65 and even as long as 100 feet. A single vessel may take part in several fisheries.

This area produces about $95 million in landings, averaging out to more than $200,000 per boat. Lobster leads the list, worth $71 million in 2002. Every year in late November, hundreds of thousands of traps lie stacked on local

Communications Nova Scotia

Fish processing plant

1773

A census is taken in France that finds 2,370 Acadians living there.

1785

Spain provides seven ships to carry over 1600 Acadians from France to Louisiana.

1881

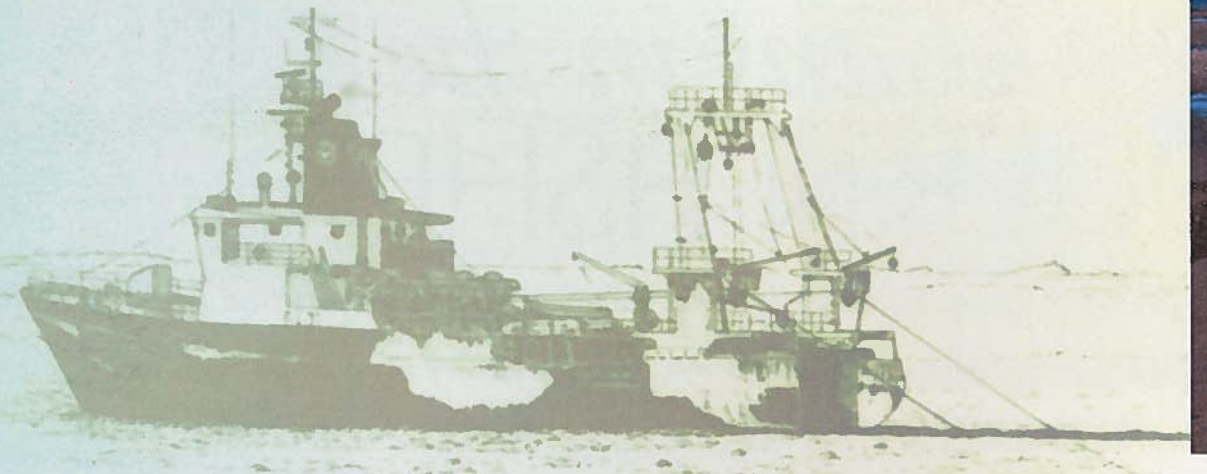
First Acadian Convention establishes August 15th as National Acadian Day.

1884

Second Acadian Convention, an Acadian flag and a national anthem are adopted.

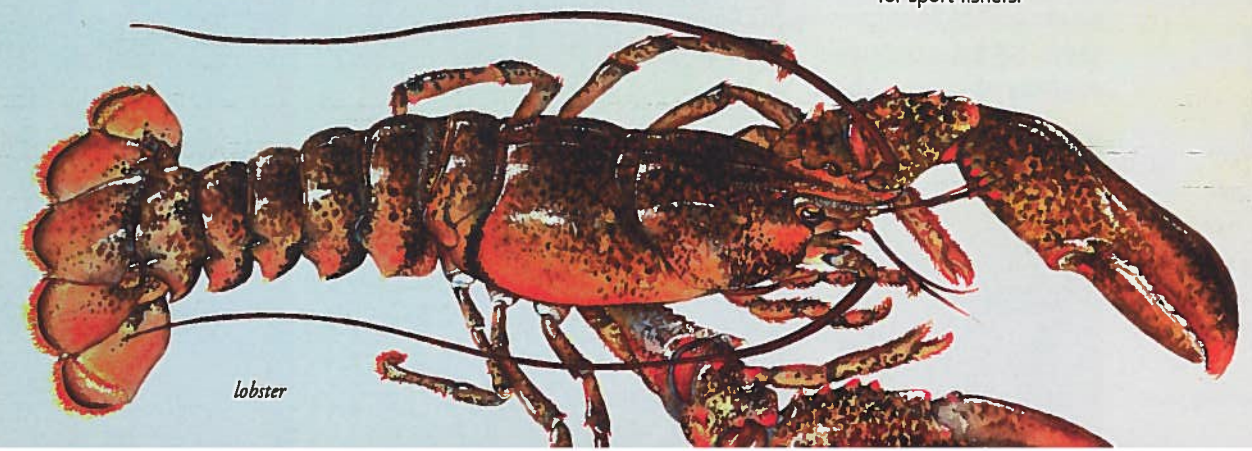
wharves, in preparation for the season. With the opening on "Dumping Day," hundreds of boats head to sea, each setting up to 375 traps in their areas of choice. fishers haul their traps daily until landings slack off and weather worsens. Landings surge again in the early spring, before the fishery closes in May.

Next in value come haddock, cod, and other groundfish. Many fishers take them with powerful draggers, vessels which tow nets along the bottom. Other fishers set out longlines near the bottom, with hundreds of hooks attached at intervals. Small handliners fishing with hook and line have mostly faded from the scene.



The area is also home to large herring-seine vessels. In this fast-moving, dramatic form of fishing, fishers search patiently through the night with pinging sonars on the often-foggy grounds; and then circle their seine nets to enclose hundreds of thousands of silver herring in a single haul.

The area's diverse fishery also includes scallops, clams, and large, far-migrating swordfish and tuna. Wedgeport was long the home of an international tuna tournament for sport fishers.



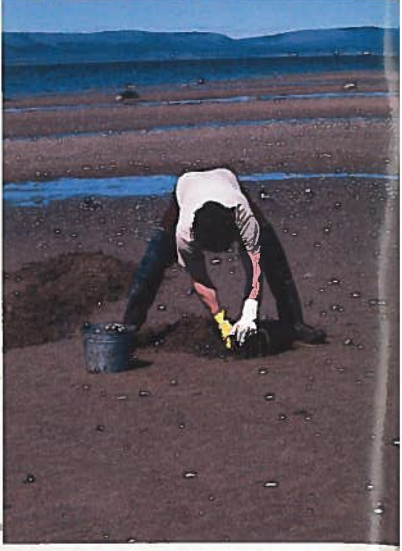
lobster

Fishers also harvest rockweed; processors extract natural additives for such foods as ice cream.

THE ST. MARY'S BAY AREA

The "French Shore" holds Nova Scotia's largest population of Acadians. From a dozen or so communities stretching from St. Bernard to below Cape St. Mary's, some 460 fishers operate more than 100 vessels. Most are sturdy craft between 35 and 45 feet, with a few ranging up to a hundred feet and more.

Meteghan and Saulnierville are the biggest ports. Fishers in these communities take part in all the area's major fisheries, and local fish companies carry on a strong international trade. This area was an early participant in the post-war scallop fishery which developed on Georges Bank, offshore between Nova Scotia and Cape Cod. The large scalloping vessels, often more than 100 feet long, use metal drags to rake up the valuable shellfish. Meteghan and Saulnierville are the biggest ports. One large enterprise at Saulnierville, takes part in all the area's major fisheries, and carries on a strong international trade.



Commercial clam digging near Chezzetcook

This firm was an early participant in the post-war scallop fishery which developed on Georges Bank, off shore between Nova Scotia and Cape Cod. The large scalloping vessels, often more than 100 feet long, use metal drags to rake up the valuable shellfish.

But scallops take only second place in landed value; lobsters lead by far. Herring seiners also work from these ports. Haddock, cod, and other groundfish, often caught with gillnets, provide about $3 million in landings. Clams support an important fishery (and often show up in local dishes such as *pâté à la râpure*, a potato-based pie). The varied list of species includes tuna and even the sea cucumber.

All told, the vigorous fishery of St. Mary's Bay lands about $31 million worth of fish and shellfish, a value increased by processing. And the fishery creates other businesses: as in the Pubnico area, boat builders are common, with Meteghan boasting an important shipyard.

Otter trawling

ISLE MADAME AND THE EASTERN SHORE

The attractive fishing villages on Isle Madame and the neighbouring mainland reflect the historic Atlantic cod fishery. Janvrin Island bears the name of an old Channel-Island firm. Petit-de-Grat denotes a type of beach where French fishers used to spread their split and salted cod to dry.

irish moss

But Isle Madame with its many coves and inlets is firmly part of the modern fishery. For example, Arichat has a huge dry-land lobster pound, storing lobsters for immediate shipment any time of year.

Harvesting irish moss in southwest Nova Scotia

In this predominantly Acadian area, more than 150 fishers operate about 75 vessels, mostly small craft less than 35 feet long. In the 1990's the groundfish fishery suffered a dramatic decline. But lobster remains important, and the crab and shrimp fisheries have blossomed, taking the lead in landed value.

After the May-July lobster season, fishers set out hundreds of crab traps, providing more than $10 million of the area's $14 million landed value. Next in value are shrimp: fishers capture them by towing narrow-meshed nets, with selector grates that bar out larger fish.

On the Eastern Shore running towards Halifax, other fishing communities retain their Acadian heritage despite pressures of assimilation. Larry's River in particular operates an active fishery. In the Chezzetcook area near Halifax, the extensive salt marshes and clam flats have long supported a major clam fishery. Lobster and crab help round out the fishing season for this historic Acadian enclave.

1994

First Acadian World Congress held in the Moncton, New Brunswick.

1999

Second Acadian World Congress held in Lafayette, Louisiana, USA.

2004

Third Acadian World Congress held in Nova Scotia.

Inshore lobster boats, Dennis Point, Yarmouth County

Acadian Museum and Archives, West Pubnico

Hauling aboard snow crab off eastern Nova Scotia

Lloyd Robichaud

CHÉTICAMP AND AREA

Where the scenic Cape Breton highlands meet the Gulf of St. Lawrence shore, Chéticamp, Grand Étang, and neighbouring settlements support a historic and highly active fishery. Here where Channel Island firms ("Jersey Houses") once ruled, fishers over generations developed their own enterprises, combining individual initiative with co-operative traditions.

On the entire Gulf coast of Cape Breton, some 900 fishers operate about 260 vessels, mostly between 25 and 50 feet long. Over the last 30 years, fishers and processors became known for a strong snow crab fishery, exporting to Japan and other world markets. Crab landings amounted to $22 million in 2002.

But the area's fishery is diverse. Lobsters in 2002 provided about $15 million, bluefin tuna about $2 million, and groundfish nearly $1.1 million. The rest of the fishery ranges over many species, from eels and alewives to clams, scallops, and even shark.

In short, Acadian fisheries cover the four corners of Nova Scotia, and send their products to the four corners of the world. They form a vital part of a major export industry.

Purse seining

Acadians in FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

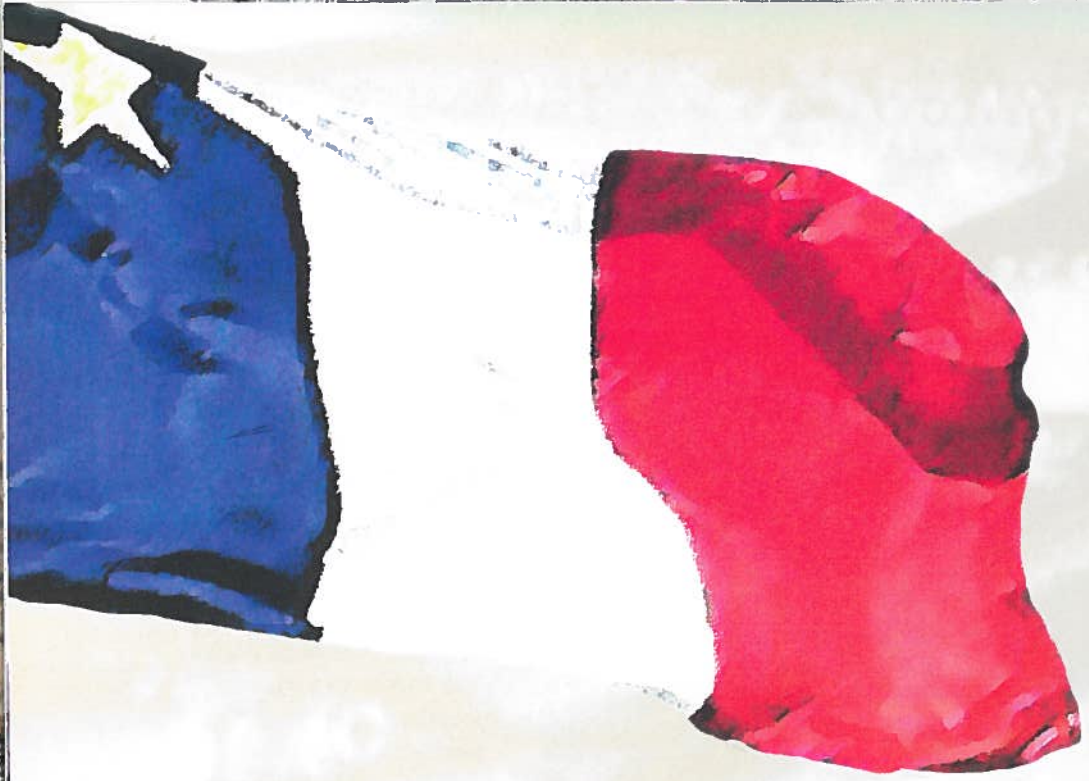
Nova Scotia's fishery has recently set new records for landed and export value. But while some fisheries have grown, others have had their troubles. Modern catching technology and high demand pose a constant threat to conservation.

To protect the fishery in Nova Scotia and elsewhere, the Canadian government uses a comprehensive system of fisheries management. Typical regulations may limit the size of boats, require selective gear, ban possession of undersized fish, and restrict seasons or areas. Catch quotas may limit the take by fishery, by area, or even by individual fisher.

Good fishery management requires both efficient administration and responsible fishers. On the administrative side, Acadians take a prominent part in research and management. As of 2003, for example, Nova Scotians of Acadian heritage held the following top positions: Canada's Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Robert Thibault; the department's Director-General for the Maritimes Region, Neil Bellefontaine; the head of the Fisheries Resource Conservation Council (the federal advisory body on research and quotas), Jean-Guy d'Entremont; and the Minister of Fisheries and Agriculture for the province of Nova Scotia, Chris d'Entremont.

Measuring lobster size, an important management tool

On the industry side, Acadian fishers influence fishery management through their organizations and through government-industry advisory processes. They also take part in "co-management", where fishers move beyond advice to action.



The Chéticamp area provides a leading example of co-management: here, fishers help to research the valuable crab resource and also to set the rules for sharing it. When landings and values reach a certain threshold, the already-licensed crabbers allow additional boats on a temporary basis; when catches drop, the new entrants leave the fishery to the original participants. As often happens, Acadians in this fishery have worked out a community-minded compromise. And in many other respects, they promote an orderly and well-managed fishery.

Acadian Coat of Arms – Société nationale de l'Acadie

Bobber: Acadian Museum and Archives, West Pubnico

The sea shaped much of Acadian history, in both commerce and culture. Acadians created beautiful songs of the sea, including the famous "Partons la mer est belle." Their flag bears the "Star of the Sea" (Stella Maris) to guide them through storms and hardships. Today that tradition continues; Acadians play a vigorous part in fishing, processing, management, and every aspect of the Nova Scotia fishery. Through their determination, their abilities, and their distinctive spirit, they have brought a special richness to a major and historic industry.


Historic and Present-Day
ACADIE in Nova Scotia
Chéticamp
Grand Étang
GULF OF ST. LAWRENCE
CAPE BRETON ISLAND
Amherst
Sydney
Louisbourg
Pomquet
BAY OF FUNDY
Isle Madame
Grand Pré
Canso
NOVA SCOTIA
Port Royal
Larry's River
Chezzetcook
Saulnierville
Halifax / Dartmouth
Clare
ATLANTIC OCEAN
Yarmouth
Argyle
Pubnico
bluefin tuna

OUR *Memories*